GOVERNMENT OF INDIA
TOURISM AND CULTURE
LOK SABHA

UNSTARRED QUESTION NO:3545
ANSWERED ON:07.04.2003
SMUGGLING OF MANUSCRIPTS
BRAHMANAND MANDAL

Will the Minister of TOURISM AND CULTURE be pleased to state:

(a) whether the Government are aware about the smuggling of ancient Indian manuscripts to European countries as reported in `Nav Bharat Times` dated February 14, 2003;

(b) if so, the total number of ancient indian manuscripts smuggled out of India so far alongwith the details thereof;

(c) whether the Government are making efforts to bring them back;

(d) if so, the details thereof;

(e) whether there is any special statutory provision for trying the smugglers of these ancient heritages;

(f) if so, the details thereof ;

(g) if not, whether the Government propose to bring any legislation whereby smuggling of these old-heritages can be prevented; and

(h) if so, the details thereof?

Answer

MINISTER FOR TOURISM AND CULTURE (SHRI JAGMOHAN)

(a) to (d) Prior to Independence, a large number of cultural objects including manuscripts had moved from the Indian subcontinent to different parts of the world. These objects are scattered among innumerable museums and private collections. There was no international covenant for the restitution of such objects. Further because of partition of the Indian subcontinent, there would be competing claims about the country of origin of these objects. In view of this, building a complete record of such objects is not only time-consuming and problematic but also unlikely to yield practical result so far as restitution is concerned.

(e) to (h) The Antiquities (Export Control) Act, 1947 was promulgated in 1947, which was succeeded by the enactment of the Antiquities and Art Treasures Act, 1972. Under this Act, illegal export is a crime. Moreover, registration of manuscripts is mandatory under this Act. Further, in respect of the countries which are signatories to the UNESCO Convention on `Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Imports, Exports and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property`, action can be initiated as per the provisions of the Convention. India is a signatory to this Convention.The Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) has been taking action wherever instances of objects taken illegally out of the country have come to its notice.